

## LOCAL

# US House unanimously approves Lumbee Recognition Act; Cherokee has opposed

*Now the question is: Will the bill pass the US Senate?*

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The U.S. House on Nov. 16 voted unanimously in favor of The Lumbee Recognition Act, a bill that would give the Southeastern North Carolina tribe full federal recognition and potentially millions of dollars in benefits.

Passage in the House gives the Lumbees hope that the Lumbee Recognition Act will become law before the end of the year.

“The Lumbee people have been praying for this day and today’s action in the House brings us one step closer to our goal,” Harvey Godwin Jr., chairman of the Lumbee tribe, said in a news release.

During the election campaign, Republican President Donald Trump visited the Lumbees in their home area, Robeson County, and promised he would sign the bill. But first it needs to pass the Senate during the lame-duck session.

► *President Trump backs recognition bill for the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina.*

The Lumbees have sought recognition since the late 1800s. In 1956, Congress granted the tribe partial recognition but specifically excluded it from the benefits that other federally recognized Native American tribes receive.

“For 64 years, the 66,000-strong Lumbee have existed in kind of official limbo that reflects the worst of our federal government,” said Republican U.S. Rep. Dan Bishop, whose district includes Robeson County, during debate on the bill on Monday.

Full recognition is expected to provide an economic boost to Robeson County, the Lumbee's home base, which has struggled with poverty as factory jobs moved overseas. With recognition, the Lumbees would qualify for grants and other money to help with workforce development, healthcare, education and infrastructure, Godwin has previously said.

“We do not seek recognition as an entitlement fostering dependency on the federal government,” Godwin said in 2016 to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. “Rather we seek resources to help us cross the bridge towards prosperity that we have been seeking for these many years.”

The bill was advanced in the House by several North Carolina lawmakers, including Bishop, Republican Rep. Richard Hudson, whose district used to include most of Robeson County, and Democratic Rep. G.K. Butterfield, who doesn't represent the Lumbees but has been an ally for them in Congress and sponsored the bill.

“I am proud to have introduced this legislation that will right a historic wrong by finally extending the Lumbee Tribe the full federal recognition they deserve,” Butterfield said in a news release. “When enacted, the Lumbee Tribe will be a sovereign entity under federal law and have access to federal funding and services that will promote economic development, access to quality health care, and robust community empowerment.”

Other recognized tribes, including the North Carolina-based Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, have sought to prevent the Lumbees from getting federal recognition. The other tribes have questioned whether the Lumbees are a distinct Native American group and have said recognition of the Lumbees would reduce services that existing recognized tribes receive.

Lumbee recognition could also lead to construction of a casino in Robeson County that would compete against the Cherokees’ casino in mountains of western North Carolina.

► SC indian nation casino opposed by Buncombe; Cherokee say \$750M at stake

The House has passed Lumbee recognition bills before. But the bills have always been stymied in the Senate.

Both North Carolina senators, Republicans Thom Tillis and Richard Burr, support Lumbee recognition and have a companion bill pending in their chamber.

If a Lumbee bill fails to pass this year, another one can be introduced when the new Congress takes office in January. Democratic President-elect Joe Biden during this year's election campaign promised he would sign a Lumbee recognition bill.

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